

A Family History.

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JOHNSON,

STEWART,

WILSON,

BOWERS.

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1872.

TO
THE DESCENDANTS
OF
MRS. MARTHA WILSON,
A WOMAN OF THE REVOLUTION,
THIS FAMILY HISTORY
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY THE COMPILER,
WINSLOW M. WATSON.



THE death at Cooperstown, N. Y., on the 6th of February, 1872, of a venerable lady, Mrs. MARGARETTA M. S. BOWERS, in the 94th year of her age, has been appropriately chronicled in the newspapers of that town. The following pages were written to commemorate the remarkable virtues of the families from which Mrs. BOWERS was descended, maternally and paternally, of whose rare excellence she was herself a signal example, and to furnish some sketches of the family of her husband, for many generations before the Revolution of the highest rank in the Colony of Massachusetts, and, after the Revolution, in the city of New York.

Mrs. BOWERS was the only child of Robert Wilson, of the Barony of Innishowen, in the north of Ireland, who emigrated to this country before the Revolution, and established himself as a merchant in Philadelphia. When the war broke out, he accompanied Gen. Washington to Cambridge, and, as Muster-master-General, was honored by the confidence of the Commander-in-Chief, and often a guest at his table. In consequence of failing health, Mr. Wilson was compelled to resign his position and return to the milder climate of New Jersey. He married there, in January, 1776, Martha Stewart, daughter of Col. Charles Stewart, of Lansdown, in the county of Hunterdon, in that Province, and became a resident of Hackettstown, near which he possessed a valuable property. During the year 1777 he was again in public service, as Assistant Commissary-General of Purchases—an appointment

which he resigned on account of his health, and again embarked in mercantile pursuits in Philadelphia, in which he was eminently successful, until his death in 1779, at the early age of twenty-eight. His wife accompanied him to Philadelphia, and resided there until his death, when she returned to Hackettstown, a widow at the age of nineteen.

Mrs. Wilson, who is familiar to all who have read Mrs. Ellett's beautiful and truthful sketch of her life in her "Women of the Revolution," was born in 1758, at Sidney, the residence of her maternal grandfather, Judge Johnston, in the county of Hunterdon, New Jersey. Sidney was one of the most stately of the old colonial mansions of West Jersey, and was erected at a period when the inhabitants of that section were in constant dread of Indian incursions. It was constructed, therefore, not only as a stronghold of the proprietor, but as a refuge for the people of the vicinage, its massive walls of stone and heavy portals often affording them protection in times of peril when the aborigines were on the war-path. Finely situated on an elevated terrace, in the midst of that lovely region, where blue hills, verdant valleys, and tufted woodlands present the perfection of the picturesque, Sidney was regarded in colonial days as one of the most desirable residences in the Province. Its proprietor, Judge Johnston, was, for more than thirty years before the Revolution, the chief magistrate of that section of the Province, and held his court, on every Monday, in one of the halls of his house. He was a gentleman of exalted virtue, and was renowned for his hospitality and his unbounded benevolence. At one time, after the commencement of the war, he had fourteen widows living upon his land as tenants, rent free.

Col. Stewart, the father of Mrs. Wilson, was a grandson of Charles Stewart, of Gortlee, in Scotland, who rode by the

side of William of Orange at the battle of the Boyne, and, for his gallantry on that day, was rewarded by his king with a demesne in the north of Ireland. Before attaining his majority, Col. Stewart emigrated to America, and, by his energy and enterprise, secured both private fortune and public influence. On the very first breath of the Revolution he embarked with his whole soul in the cause of the Colonies, and with the Livingstons, Stocktons, and Patersons, at the first meeting of the patriots of New Jersey, was prominent in his resistance to the aggressions of the mother country. He became a member of the First Provincial Congress of New Jersey; colonel of the First regiment of Minute Men; colonel of the Second regiment of the line; and, eventually, one of the staff of Gen. Washington, as Commissary-General of Issues, in 1776.

Previous to the Revolution, Col. Stewart resided at Lansdown, a beautiful estate in the immediate vicinity of Sidney, the residence of his father-in-law. His hospitality was unbounded. His friend, Chief Justice Smith, has expressed this trait of character in his epitaph: "The friend and the stranger were almost compelled to come in." His house was the resort of the choice spirits of the time, and it was by his fireside that his daughter, bereaved of her mother at the age of thirteen, and from that early age presiding over her father's household, imbibed those principles of patriotism and that love of freedom which entitle her to a place among the "Women of the Revolution." The wife of Col. Stewart was distinguished by elegance of manners and great personal beauty. In whatever assemblage she appeared, she always attracted the attention of all around her. Her mental accomplishments were of a high order, and she was regarded as the best-read woman in the Province.

Mrs. Wilson's residence in New Jersey was within a few miles of the headquarters of Gen. Washington, of whose staff her father, Col. Stewart, was a member. With Gen. Washington she was on terms of friendship. He was frequently her guest, as also were Greene, LaFayette, Wayne, Hamilton, Henry Lee, Pulaski, Gates, and other officers of the Revolutionary army. On one occasion, soon after the death of André, Mrs. Wilson entertained General and Mrs. Washington, with his staff, for two days—a company of from thirty to forty persons. Mrs. Washington was several times the guest of Mrs. Wilson while on her way to and from the camp. On one of these visits Mrs. Washington informed her that she had a great deal of domestic cloth made in her own house; that she kept sixteen spinning-wheels in constant operation, and showed her two dresses of cotton, striped with silk, made by her own servants—the silk stripes being made from the ravelings of brown silk stockings and old crimson damask chair covers.

It was not alone for friends and persons of distinction that Mrs. Wilson kept open house during the Revolution. Her gates on the public road bore in conspicuous characters the inscription: "Hospitality within to all American officers, and refreshment for their soldiers."

Mrs. Wilson was a witness of many of the most remarkable scenes of the Revolution. She was in Philadelphia on the day of the Declaration of Independence, and made one of a party, embracing the *elite* of the beauty, wealth, and fashion of the city and its vicinage, entertained at a brilliant fête given in honor of the event on board the frigate Washington, at anchor in the Delaware, by Capt. Reid, the commander. The magnificent brocade which she wore on this occasion, with its hooped petticoat, flowing train, laces, gimp, and flow-

ers, remained in its wardrobe unaltered long after the commencement of the present century. A month afterwards she witnessed the mustering of her neighbors in West Jersey under the banner of her uncle, Col. Philip Johnston, of Sidney, and their arming for the battle of Long Island. Col. Johnston had abandoned his studies at Princeton for the sword, in the French war of 1755, where he gained so high a reputation as a soldier as to be appointed by the Congress of New Jersey to the command of its first volunteer regiment. He was tall, athletic, and of great physical power, and was killed on Long Island a few days afterward, in the disastrous conflict of August 27, 1776. Gen. Sullivan, under whom he served, in his report on the battle, alludes to Col. Johnston as being "as gallant an officer as ever commanded a battalion."

After the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, Col. Stewart removed from Lansdown to Union, in the adjoining township of Lebanon. Like Sidney, this old residence was in that day one of the great houses of West Jersey. Its surrounding farm of a thousand acres, under fine cultivation, was noted throughout the State. The house, which was very large, enclosed a quadrangular court-yard, and, with its out-buildings, presented the aspect of a hamlet. Of this great establishment of Col. Stewart, renowned throughout New Jersey, and the adjacent States of New York and Pennsylvania, for generous hospitality, Mrs. Wilson was the wise, benevolent, and energetic manager, until the death of her father in 1800. For a period of nearly fifteen years after the death of Col. Stewart, Mrs. Wilson, as his sole administratrix, was engaged in the settlement of a large and widely-extended landed estate, including the disputed proprietorship of a portion of the Wyoming valley. By the strength of

mind, clearness of judgment, and firmness of purpose exhibited in these years, Mrs. Wilson acquired the respect and admiration of the most eminent members of the legal profession. By the death of a brother, his two orphan sons were left to her care, and educated by her. One of these sons, the late Rev. Charles S. Stewart, for many years a missionary to the Sandwich Islands, and subsequently a chaplain of the U. S. Navy, was universally known and esteemed throughout the country.

From New Jersey, Mrs. Wilson removed, in 1808, to Cooperstown, N. Y., where for many years she occupied her own house in that village; but for a long time before the close of her life lived at Lakelands, the beautiful residence of her daughter, Mrs. BOWERS, on Otsego Lake, in the immediate vicinity of Cooperstown.

In her youth, Mrs. Wilson was remarkable for her beauty. At the age of thirty-eight, a lady of Philadelphia thus writes of her during a visit to that city, in the year 1796: "I wish you could see dear Mrs. Wilson; she is the genteelest, easiest, prettiest person I have seen in the city. I hear many others constantly express the same opinion. She looked charmingly this evening in a Brunswick robe of striped muslin, trimmed with spotted lawn; a beautiful handkerchief gracefully arranged on her neck, and her hair becomingly craped and thrown into curls under a very elegant white bonnet with green-leafed band, worn on one side. She says she is almost worn out with a round of visiting among the Chews, Conynghams, Moylans, Mrs. Gen. Stewart, and others; but she does not look so. I do not wonder that all who know this good lady should so love her. I am sure no one could know her intimately and not do so."

Mrs. Wilson was, in many respects, one of the most remarkable women of her time. Her life, which commenced in the reign of George the Second, eighteen years before the Declaration of American Independence, extended beyond the middle of the present century—comprising nearly a century of years! From the year 1771, when she became the mistress of her father's household, to her death, on the 15th of March, 1852, this lovely and truly admirable woman led a life “abounding in charities and full of good works.” From her early youth a member of the Presbyterian church, her example as a Christian, in the language of her biographer, “was ever in harmony with the leading traits of her character—consistent, energetic, decisive. Respected and honored by all who knew her, and reposing in the affections of a devoted household, with the blessings of unnumbered poor—the widow, the orphan, the destitute and friendless of every name—descending like the dews of Hermon upon her head,” she cheerfully awaited the coming of the angel of death.

The ancestors of the Bowers emigrated from Swansea, in Wales, in the 17th century, and settled in Massachusetts, near the Rhode Island line, in a town to which they gave the name of Swansea, of which they were the principal proprietors. They were Quakers, and men of great wealth. One of their descendants, Col. Jerathmeel Bowers, lived at Somerset, a town adjoining Swansea on the south. Col. Bowers was one of the most influential persons in the Colony of Massachusetts. In the year 1769 he was elected by the House of Representatives to the Executive Council, with James Otis, James Bowdoin, Wm. Brattle, and other distinguished citizens, all of whom were rejected by Governor Bernard, on account of their opposition to the arbitrary measures of the British Gov-

ernment. Col. Bowers lived in great state at Somerset. His house was on the route then travelled between Boston and Newport, and his hospitable doors were ever open to his friends in both Colonies as they journeyed to and fro between the two principal towns in New England, in their lumbering chariots and heavy English family carriages.

Henry Bowers, a brother of Col. Bowers, was one of the most eminent merchants of his time. He was the owner of eighteen square-rigged vessels, most of which were taken during the Revolution. His house and gardens at Somerset were not surpassed by any in the Colonies. Admiral Montague, of the British navy, who was in America before the Revolution, said if he were to describe them in England no one would believe him. Henry Bowers was a very handsome man, a perfect gentleman in his manners, and very strict in his religious observances. He wore drab clothes, with apple-tree buttons, in remembrance, doubtless, of his Quaker ancestry.

Henry Bowers, a son of the above, was born in Somerset in 1747. He was a gentleman of fine personal appearance, very systematic in his business affairs, and very correct in all his habits, but extremely nervous. He married, in 1772, Mary, daughter of John Ray Myer, of the city of New York, who was the son of Hendrick Myer and Mary Ray. The Myers were Hollanders; the Rays, English. John Ray Myer married Miss Crommelin, a niece of Crommelin, the most opulent banker of Amsterdam. One of Mrs. Myer's sisters married a Ludlow, and the other a Verplanck, and became the mother of that distinguished scholar, the late Gulian Crommelin Verplanck.

Mrs. Crommelin, the mother of Mrs. Myer, came out to America after the death of her husband, and resided in New

York until her death. She was a woman of unusual attainments in the ancient and modern languages, and instructed her grandson, Gulian C. Verplanck, in Greek and Latin, at an early age. Mrs. Crommelin was also a lady of the *grand monde*, and her style of dress was of the highest French fashion. There were recently living persons who remember her as she promenaded Wall street, in a pink satin dress and high-heeled shoes, with powdered hair in the style of Marie Antoinette. John Ray Myer inherited a large landed estate from his father, comprising a great portion of Wall and William streets. He lived prudently, but without other occupation than the care of his property, and was by nature of indolent habits.

Henry Bowers resided for some years after his marriage on that fine estate in Brighton, Mass., well known in the earlier part of the present century as the residence of Gen. Pomeroy, one of the most eminent agriculturists of his time. The house, which is very ancient, is one of the finest relics of colonial times. It stands upon a lofty eminence, and, from the rear, commands a view of Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown, and the waters of the Bay, with its numerous islands. After the removal of Gen. Pomeroy to Ohio, this valuable estate became the property of the late John D'Wolf, of Rhode Island. Henry Bowers removed to the city of New York in the latter part of the last century, and took up his residence in Wall street, then the most fashionable street in that city. He died in 1800, at the age of fifty-three.

John M. Bowers, only son of Henry Bowers, was born September 25, 1772, in Boston, where his mother was at the time on a visit. He was married, June 12, 1802, to Miss Margaretta M. S. Wilson, the only child of Mrs. Wilson, of New Jersey. A sister of Mr. Bowers married James

Duane, Esq., son of the Hon. James Duane, Mayor of the city of New York soon after the Revolution, and well known as the friend and correspondent of Alexander Hamilton. Mr. Duane resided for the greater part of his life in Schenectady, of which city he was an eminent and respected citizen. Another sister of Mr. Bowers married Mr. Mumford, an accomplished gentleman of New York, and also, in his later days, a resident of Schenectady. The late Mrs. A. Y. C. Paige of that city was a daughter of Mr. Mumford. The Rev. Robert T. S. Lowell of the Episcopal Church, author of the "New Priest at Conception Bay," and other books of rare merit, married a granddaughter of James Duane, of Schenectady.

Miss Wilson made her entrance into society, in Philadelphia, during the Presidency of Washington. The hospitality extended to Gen. Washington and his wife by Mrs. Wilson, during the Revolution, was most kindly reciprocated by them to her daughter. In personal calls and invitations to her private parties, Mrs. Washington distinguished her by courtesies rarely shown to persons of her age. A letter from a lady of that time, preserved by Mrs. Ellett in her "Women of the Revolution," thus describes Miss Wilson's appearance at a reception of the President's: "Miss Wilson looked beautifully last night. She was in full dress, yet in elegant simplicity. She wore book muslin over white mantua, trimmed with broad lace round the neck; half sleeves of the same, also trimmed with lace; with white satin sash and slippers; her hair elegantly dressed in curls, without flowers, feathers, or jewelry. Mrs. Moylan told me she was the handsomest person at the drawing-room, and more admired than any one there."

Of the numerous train of Miss Wilson's admirers, at this

period of her life, no one was more devoted than a young lieutenant of the navy, a distant kinsman of her family, and destined in after years to achieve the highest glory as a great naval commander—Charles Stewart, of Philadelphia—who, tradition reports, imagined his affection was returned by Miss Wilson, when he took leave of her to embark on his memorable cruise in the West Indian waters at the beginning of the present century. But, during his absence, a rival, handsome, opulent, and accomplished—Mr. John M. Bowers, of New York—bore off the prize. When Stewart returned to the United States, his enjoyment of the brilliant ovation which awaited him was saddened by the intelligence that the woman to whom he had given his heart had given her hand to another.

Soon after his marriage, Mr. Bowers removed to Cooperstown, and took possession of a very large tract of land in that vicinity which his father had given him. He erected a beautiful house on the border of Otsego Lake, commenced his residence within its walls in the autumn of 1805, and resided there until his death, on the 24th of February, 1846. Mr. Bowers was one of the most accomplished gentlemen of his time. Well read, and endowed with superior powers of conversation and fascinating manners, with a heart filled with noble and generous impulses, and a mind stored with the choicest passages of English literature and the most delightful reminiscences of New York society in the days of his early manhood, his company was sought for and appreciated by the most gifted of his contemporaries. His wife, equally accomplished, and in her character strongly resembling her mother, from whom she inherited, with rare personal beauty, an intellect of singular power and brightness, charmed all who enjoyed

the privilege of her acquaintance by a "sweet simplicity of manner, a peculiar archness of wit, and fascinating powers of conversation." Her beautiful home, Lakelands, was for nearly seventy years the centre of a hospitality as distinguished for profusion, elegance, and heartiness as, for seventy years previous, had been the hospitality of her maternal ancestry in New Jersey. Like the honored race from which she sprang, her hand was always open to the poor—her heart full of sympathy for every child of affliction. Like them and like her mother, she was a firm believer in the truths of the Christian religion, which she daily exemplified in the beauty of her life. At the time of her mother's death, Mrs. BOWERS had herself attained the age of seventy-four years. For nearly forty-five years after her marriage she had been blessed with that mother's companionship, in the immediate vicinity of her own house or under her own roof. Her own life was prolonged for twenty years after the death of her mother—their lives embracing each the same extraordinary length of days.

This comparatively brief record of a family distinguished by nearly all the virtues which can adorn humanity would be imperfect without a tribute to the memory of the eldest daughter of Mr. John M. Bowers—the late Mrs. Mary M. Warren, wife of the Hon. Geo. B. Warren, of Troy, N. Y. Mrs. Warren's death occurred on the 26th of August, 1851, and was sincerely mourned, not only by the inhabitants of that city, where she had spent her whole married life, but by an almost innumerable host of friends throughout the country, to whom she was endeared by her rare loveliness of mind and person, her grace and amenity of manner, her unrivalled hospitality, her kindly, sympathetic heart, and an indefinable charm in all her ways, which threw, as it were,

a spell over every one, gentle or simple, who approached her. Happily married to a gentleman of fortune, and of a family identified with his native city from its foundation, Mrs. Warren found in her husband a willing co-operator in that mode of life in which she had been reared. Their house became renowned for its agreeable society, as a resort for men of letters, artists, and all persons, however distinguished, who from time to time visited the city; for its delightful social assemblages, and the atmosphere of elegance and refinement by which it was pervaded. From her first entrance into the society of Troy, as a bride, until her final departure to the better land, it may be doubted whether any other lady of that city was more cordially esteemed by all classes of the community.



CENTENNIAL MEETING

OF THE

Descendants of Isaac Laborence,

NOVEMBER 27, 1851.

